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A "Hero of Our Time": The *Gastarbeiter* in Recent Russian Cinema

The title of this article makes a connection to Mikhail Lermontov's novel of the same title, and fits here for two reasons: it queries the role of the *Gastarbeiter*,[1] or migrant worker, as a protagonist in Russia cinema; and it geographically locates the new "hero" in the Caucasus region, where Lermontov's novel is set.

The theme of migration, specifically the migrant worker, has taken a prominent place in recent cinema, both Russian and European. However, European cinema focuses predominantly on migrants who remain in their destination country permanently, whereas the *Gastarbeiter* in Russian cinema seeks largely temporary employment with the wish to return home. Moreover, the concepts of deterritorialization and nomadism (Deleuze and Guattari 1986), often applied to the representation of migration in European cinema, are not useful here, as the protagonists see the displacement as a disruption of their sedentary lifestyle and not as resisting conventional forms of (Western) life. In Russian cinema, the theme of internal migration within the post-Soviet space takes precedence over the theme of emigration to foreign lands (which often requires co-production; see Beumers 2008).

Yet what is curious in Russian films is the role that this migrant worker plays: if we may expect migrant workers to be seen as "other" and different, in recent films we can observe a tendency to portray the migrant worker as a victim of specifically Russian aggression. It is this role that I wish to consider here. First, the role of the victim is one that is traditionally reserved in cinema for the Russian character, while active characters are associated with negative roles (see

[1] The Russian language uses the term гастарбайтер [transliterated *gastarbaiter*], a loanword from German, where it was first used in connection with the migrant work force in post-war West Germany of the 1960s and 1970s. I have here adopted the original German spelling, leaving the transliterated term for the title of a film discussed in the article.

Beumers 2008). In confrontations with the Other, or an enemy (as we can see in war/cold war films), the Russian character is often ill-equipped and makes the best of what he has, but achieves his aims triumphantly through determination and moral superiority. In other words: his heroism is defined by an ability to sustain suffering, with all the cultural and philosophical links to kenoticism and the Orthodox faith that follow. Secondly, the characteristic feature of aggression, along with activity and assertiveness, is normally reserved for the "enemy." We can go back to Fedor Dostoevskii's Rodion Raskol'nikov to find confirmation of this pattern, but we may also study the cultural output of Soviet Russia, especially films of WWII and the Cold War era, as have been explored in the collections *Russia and its Other(s) on Film* (Hutchings 2008) and *Insiders and Outsiders in Russian Cinema* (Norris and Torlone 2008).

In *Insiders and Outsiders*, Oleg Sulkin (2008) addresses the war film and the confrontation between "us" and "them," and observes a continuation of a confrontation between these two sides in contemporary cinema in films such as Stanislav Govorukhin's *Voroshilovskii strelok* [*The Voroshilov Sharpshooter*] (1999), where the new Russian is defined as the enemy, while in Vadim Abdrashitov's *Magnitnye buri* [*Magnetic Storms*] (2003) the filmmaker singles out a different kind of Russian, a business-minded man, who goes against his own workforce in a film set in the perestroika period. Continuing this line of argument of a confrontation between us vs. them, both Anthony Anemone (2008) and Stephen Norris (in Norris and Torlone 2008, ix-xvii) show how Aleksei Balabanov's Danila Bagrov (*Brat* [*Brother*], 1997) functions as an outsider, because he is a vigilante hero who takes action where others remain passive: "Balabanov has consistently used outsiders and vigilante heroes as a means of redefining what it means to be 'Russian' after the USSR." (Norris 2008, xiii). Norris further argues that this aggression serves "to preserve what they [Balabanov's heroes] see as 'ours'" (ibid.). The dilemma of having to defend Russian values (passivity, submissiveness) by means that are incompatible with them makes Danila such a contradictory and ambiguous character.

These two comprehensive studies were published in 2008, and both do not—and cannot—cover a more recent phenomenon: the Other that is different from a Russian national identity, yet part of the Soviet identity. This concerns citizens of the formerly Soviet republics that have now gained independence, yet still depend on

Moscow economically for making a living: the *Gastarbeiter* comes here not from a foreign country, but at the same time he comes from abroad. This dilemma of a Soviet/Russian and Soviet/non-Russian identity stands at the centre of this paper and of some recent films I would like to explore here. What I am interested here is not so much the religious difference that prevails in European transnational cinema, which introduces a new element into the relationship between Russian and non-Russian/former Soviet identities (that formed no part of the relationship between peoples in the Soviet era), but the social factors that are addressed in film and the social message that these films convey. How do filmmakers view just not the Other, but the Other in the capital?

I shall address the following issues about the *Gastarbeiter* in cinema: first, the portrayal of the *Gastarbeiter* in recent Russian cinema; secondly, the extent to which special government incentives are responsible for the surge in the migration theme in cinema, and—in this connection—whether cinema has (once again) been turned into a tool for propaganda; and thirdly, how films about migration define the relationship between Self and Other, and thus speak of anxieties towards the Other at a time of collapse for the collective Soviet identity and failure to positively define Russian identity.

The *Gastarbeiter* goes to the movies

It is probably opportune and historically accurate to pinpoint one of the first manifestations of xenophobia on the silver screen to Aleksei Balabanov's *Brother* (1997). Ever since the infamous and much-cited phrase of Danila Bagrov when defending the ticket collector in a Petersburg tram and telling the Caucasian aggressor «Ты мне не брат, гнида черножопая» [You're not my brother, you black-arsed louse], issues of racism and xenophobia have been at the forefront of critical attention, and Balabanov has been frequently accused of nationalist and Russophile views. I have argued elsewhere that, while "Balabanov undisputedly promotes a Russian way of life," he is

> not a nationalist and Russophile, but a political left-winger [... who] resurrects the concept of Moscow not as the centre of socialist ideology, but of a practical and humanist socialism which redistributes wealth and fights crime. (Beumers 2007, 240–41)

By far not the only film to address the tension between the Caucasus and the centre, *Brother* pitches the filmmaker's Russophile position and defines the hatred not so much of foreigners, but more precisely of Caucasians, within Russia in the late 1990s, at a time of belligerent tension between Russia and Chechnya that extended to Dagestan, Abkhazia, Ossetia and Georgia. At the same time, trouble in the Caucasus and poverty in large parts of Central Asia led to migration, largely illegal, of workers from the regions to Russia, specifically to the capital, Moscow. These workers paid to obtain semi-legal papers, residence and work permits.[2] As a social phenomenon in Moscow, migrant workers became an important theme for documentary theatre, but they did not immediately appeal to the screen.

Aleksandr Rodionov's verbatim play *Voina moldovan za kartonnuiu korobku* [*The War of the Moldovans for a Cardboard Box*] (2003) describes the Moscow existence of homeless migrants from Moldova as they are sleeping in a cardboard box, humiliated and cruelly beaten up by the police. After that episode, an abusive verbal exchange occurs between Igor', Vasia and the neighbors sleeping in the next box, who had effectively saved them from a rougher beating. The unmotivated aggression is expressed in the use of *mat* as the only answer to the endured violence (aggressive-defensive abusive language). *Mat* is also present in another scene where Igor's friend Vasia has just done push-ups on the orders of a policeman who mocked him and tells a fantastic story about how he «в Кишиневе одну певицу ебал» [fucked a singer in Kishinev]. However, despite the absence of external aggression in this narration, the meaning of *mat* remains the same: a symbolical (and unconscious) compensation and a marker of endured violence. In documentary theatre, *mat* as a language of aggression and reaction to violence unites such disconnected subcultures as the worlds of prisoners, homeless, illegal immigrants and corporate managers, television producers and gays. *Mat* is the common denominator, effectively the only meta-language of modern Russia (see Beumers and Lipovetsky 2009, 209–237).

While drama had found a way of expressing the frustration and aggression through verbal means, the silver screen struggled

[2] For studies on migration in the former Soviet territories see, for example, Pilkington 1997. More recent studies include Buckley, Ruble and Hofmann 2008; Laruelle 2007; Rahmonova-Schwarz 2010.

with its portrayal of migrants. It was not until the 2000s that the *Gastarbeiter* appeared in central roles on screen—largely as a result of the connections with documentary theatre and the verbatim technique, which concerned itself with marginal social groups. A great number of film scripts at the time were written by documentary theatre playwrights. Moreover, the migration of filmmakers themselves from the former Soviet republics to Moscow further promoted the theme of migration: Yusup Razykov, head of Uzbekfil'm since 1990, left Tashkent in 2006; Usmon Saparov and Khodjakuli Narliev had emigrated from Turkmenistan in the early 1990s; Bakhtiyor Khudoinazarov left Dushanbe during the Civil War.

A number of documentaries have poignantly addressed the issue of the lack of acceptance of migrants as Others, whether these are *Gastarbeiter* from the Caucasus and Central Asia—for example in Bakur Bakuradze and Dmitrii Mamuliia's short, live-action film *Moskva* [*Moscow*] (2007), or whether these are Jews—as in the short film *Plakat* [*The Billboard*] (2006)—where a billboard with the words «Смерть жидам» [Death to the Jews] is placed by the side of a motorway while the camera captures the indifference of those who drive past—except one woman who stops to trash the board and who is blown up by a booby-trap bomb attached to it. This indifference as well as animosity vis-à-vis an external, identifiable Other is captured in the finale of *Moscow*, which also emphasizes the documentary approach in the camerawork. The film deals with the life of migrant workers in Moscow, ending with a frame that is almost static and exposes the threat of indifference and aggression as two skinheads take their seats on a night bus behind and in front of a young migrant; as the latter realizes the potential threat and remains passive, the camera pans to a fellow-passenger, a young girl, who has observed the scene and now turns her head away. The filmmakers leave open to interpretation not only what is more condemnable—the indifference of others or the threat of the skinheads—but also what happens to the young migrant worker.

The theme of migrant workers appears to come into focus during the latter half of the 2000s, when several organizations were formed or began to channel their funding into cultural areas. Thus, MiRPAL (Migration and Remittance Peer Assisted Learning Network) has a fond "Migratsiia XXI vek" which sponsors a range of activities in support of legal, financial and other aid for migrant workers, es-

pecially when it comes to their status within Russia. Similarly and more importantly, IFESCCO, the Intergovernmental Foundation for Education, Scientific and Cultural Cooperation (Mezhgosudarstvennyi fond gumanitarnogo sotrudnichestva [MFGS] gosudarstv-uchastnikov SNG), was established in 2006 to fund a range of activities, including cultural exchange, between the member states Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, with Azerbaijan joining in 2008. Mikhail Shvydkoi, the former Minister of Culture who subsequently held a range of advisory roles in cultural organizations, is the governing body.

At around the same time, a series of films showed Chechens in roles where they were supportive of Russians, but these were peripheral roles. Thus, in Nikita Mikhalkov's *12* [*Twelve*] (2007), the young Chechen man falsely accused of murder is freed thanks to the gracious protection of the jury steered by none other than the character played by the filmmaker himself. Aleksandr Sokurov's *Aleksandra* [*Alexandra*] (2007) also shows Chechen women—mothers—supportive of the grandmother (Galina Vishnevskaia), who comes to visit her grandson serving in the Russian army. A friendly attitude to a Chechen boy is also shown in Andrei Stempkovskii's *Obratnoe dvizhenie* [*Reverse Motion*] (2010), which sees a mother who has lost her son in Chechnya adopt, protect and help a Chechen orphan. In all these films, the Russians are never directly shown as aggressors, but instead as helpers, kind and generous.

Operates in a different vein Pavel Bardin's pseudo-documentary *Rossiia 88* [*Russia 88*] (2009). The film was deemed to be so disturbing that no license was granted to distribute it in Russia. For this fictional film, Bardin used footage of the activities of skinheads, recorded on a mobile camera, which was allegedly intended for publicity. Rather than offering a straightforward documentary, *Russia 88* then turns its attention to the gang leader, Blade, played by the popular actor Petr Fedorov (also the film's co-producer), who comes from a perfectly "normal" family, which he destroys when he realizes his sister Julia's infatuation with a young man from the Caucasus. The documentary camera movements, with some scenes filmed in basements where the skinheads actually meet, are intermingled with the fictional, staged plot; the actor plays a role both in the documentary scenes and in the invented story, thus breaking down the border between real and fictional. *Russia 88* shows, above all, the potential of film as a means for criticism,

and thus de-emphasizes the documentary cult of the 1920s and early 1930s when the manufactured visual document often served for propaganda purposes and presented a carefully constructed set of facts (Papazian 2008).

The camera observes Julia and her boyfriend Robert (with the obvious reference to Romeo and Juliet in the names) as they meet at the market; later Sasha ("Blade") returns home and finds Robert there. He provokes him and calls for a meeting, where the two fronts, Caucasian migrants and skinheads, run into each other on a bridge. While the skinheads scream Nazi slogans, carry arms and use dogs for manhunts, the Caucasians manage to win the fight—seemingly through sheer solidarity and a need to defend themselves. After the fight, Julia leaves her home; she is followed and gunned down along with Robert in a backyard—by her own brother. Family ties are no longer meaningful for the Russians—yet, as for the Caucasian minorities, their sense of solidarity helps them win over the aggressor.

The film is worrying in its portrayal of the hatred against all foreign elements, which is highlighted twice during the film, when Blade with "Abraham" (the man who follows him with a film camera) "interviews" ordinary Moscow citizens and asks them whether they support the slogan "Russia for Russians." The nationalist tendency in the population is as worrying as the Nazist activities and gatherings of Blade's group.

The Migrant as Victim

In both Balabanov's and Bardin's films the migrant worker becomes the victim of a Russian aggressor, who is motivated by nationalistic feelings. Both films identify individuals as aggressors, who are shown in a negative and shocking manner, and both films caused a controversy in the press and in distribution. A different situation emerges in more recent films, where the migrant worker is the victim—of a system, of society, of political structures at large. Maybe the best and earliest example is Boris Khlebnikov's *Sumasshedshaia pomoshch'* [*Help Gone Mad*] (2009) where Evgenii Sytyi plays a migrant worker from Belarus: dumb, but kind and helpful, even though he cannot really find his way round Moscow. He is entirely harmless and peaceful, a bit of an imbecile, but confident because, after all, he has a cell phone. And precisely this

phone is stolen as he is beaten up in the opening sequence. Indeed, his arrival in Moscow is portrayed cinematically as if he were about to prostitute himself. Like female prostitutes, he lines up with other workers on the main road into Moscow, near Mytishchi in the north of the capital, only to be picked up by a female driver who takes him home—in order for him to paint the house and fix a few things. The reference to prostitution here is telling: the *Gastarbeiter* from the west sells his services to a rich and affluent Russian as if prostituting himself. He is doomed to exploitation and turns into a victim of crime once he reaches the capital.

Yusup Razykov's *Gastarbaiter* (2010) offers a similar portrayal of the migrant worker in Moscow. The film is not based on Eduard Bagirov's novel *Gastarbaiter*, which caused furor in 2007, where the author—himself an émigré from Turkmenistan—describes his experience as a migrant in Moscow in the early 1990s. Shortly after his arrival from Uzbekistan, the old Sadyk is arrested and exiled from the city: he has been set up by a criminal structure in his Uzbek home village who have used him, unbeknownst to him, to transport drugs. The Russian police are portrayed in an entirely positive light, allowing both the old man and the prostitute Vika to leave the police station without charges. Indeed, for Sadyk the decisive factor is his age and the fact that he has served during the war, for which his numerous medals provide ample evidence. Sadyk turns into something of a *Gastarbeiter*, washing dishes and selling his medals to make a living while he searches for his grandson Oman in Serpukhov near Moscow. Following the death of Sadyk's son, his daughter-in-law was exposed and prey to the local mafia. For this reason, Sadyk has come to Moscow to search for Oman, who has left the village precisely in order not to become involved in the mafia's dealings. In this sense, both Vika and Sadyk are victims of social systems: Vika of capitalist sex exploitation in Moscow, Sadyk of the Uzbek mafia. And in this sense, Razykov paints an almost saintly picture of Russian society vis-à-vis migrants: the police may raid the apartment, presumably after a tip-off, but they treat Vika and Sadyk well.

Rather, it is the fear of the young Russian woman, Katerina, who is in love with Sadyk's grandson Oman, that poses a threat and scuppers the happy reunion of granddad and grandson in the end. She fears that Sadyk might take Oman away from her, while she expects a child and has, in her own words, never had a better man in her life: caring, loving, and kind. Oman has been arrested for il-

legal work, but will be reinstated now that Sadyk has brought his passport. The film thus suggests that the illegal migrant worker is a valuable addition to (Russian) society: the grandson has served his sentence, and will become a proper resident with a passport and a Russian family. The film idealistically portrays Russian society—at least in Serpukhov—as all-embracing and multi-ethnic. There is not a single confrontation here between Russians and migrant workers. Instead, there is corruption back home in the Uzbek village, which Oman has left, which his mother will leave, and to which Sadyk will not return: the old man dies once he realizes he has found his grandson. It should come as no surprise that the film received state funding.

President Medvedev's view of what cinema should and should not do was guided by the presidential advisory council (from which Nikita Mikhalkov has been excluded in July 2011). Medvedev's approval of a state commission (*goszakaz*) for thematic streams with the aim of creating a more positive screen image of the country for foreign and Russian citizens, drawing analogies with funding for cinema in the US and France, stems from Vladimir Khotinenko, Mikhalkov's ally. At a meeting of the presidential councils in the city of Vladimir on 22 July 2011, Medvedev supported the state commission in Russian cinema, as «просто необходим для определенного рода фильмов. К таким фильмам относятся картины, освещающие исторические события, а так же социальные фильмы, формирующие положительный имидж страны для иностранных и российских граждан, призывающий вести активный образ жизни на примере героев с экрана» ["simply essential for a certain kind of films. Such films are those that deal with historical events, as well as social films, which form a positive image of the country for foreign and Russian citizens, calling for an active lifestyle through the example of the heroes portrayed on screen"] (Anon. 2011). He added that it was necessary to «постепенно отходить от ‹фестивальной черноты›, когда формируется образ бедной, разрушенной страны» [gradually depart from the 'festival bleakness' that forms the image of a poor and derelict country] (ibid.).

If in the Russian cinema of the 1990s and early 2000s the migrant worker is a victim and the Russian plays the role of the aggressor, then in more recent films broader structures are responsible, while the migrant remains in the role of the victim—of circumstance.

In the Soviet era, Russians (when compared to foreigners) played the role of the victim and thus gained moral superiority through suffering and the endurance of injustice. The above-mentioned shift—from individual to system—signals a more assertive identity formulated by social and political developments that we might associate with the image of President Vladimir Putin. However, the Russian characters are simultaneously driven into a negative, because active role. Therefore, a shift of aggression to structures at large rather than individuals can be observed.

Such a shift of responsibility for the victimization of migrants can be seen in Dmitrii Mamuliia's *Drugoe nebo* [*Another Sky*] (2010), which deals with a father and his son arriving in Moscow to search for the mother. Their struggle for survival and the exploitation they face at work is in many ways reminiscent of other migrant worker films, such as Richard Linklater's *Fast Food Nation* (US, 2006), showing the exploitation of Mexican workers in the US. It is also no accident that the cast for this film is non-Russian, or rather not drawn from the republics providing the migrant workforce. Instead, the film casts the French-Tunisian Habib Boufares, who first appeared in Abdellatif Kechiche's *La graine et le mulet* [*Couscous*] (2007)—a construction worker and non-professional, along the Iranian émigré actress Mithra Zahedi cast in the main parts, sending a more universal message about migration.

Mamuliia's film first shows Ali in his native village in Tajikistan, where he drives around a barren landscape with his son and loads dead animals onto his truck. The landscape is arid, the animals are dying of a disease (presumably foot-and-mouth): there is no future, only death. At home, Ali waits for his beloved wife, looking at her photos and touching her cheap jewelry: she has gone to Moscow to earn a living for the family. With no news and no money from her, the family has nothing to live on. So Ali takes their son and boards a train to Moscow to look for his wife. Their journey is not one of resistance against a traditional lifestyle, as is often the case in European cinema, but serves to reinstate it—albeit unsuccessfully. Once Ali has arrived, he is treated like all Central Asian migrants and subjected to a disinfection procedure, captured by Alisher Khamidkhodjaev's camera in grim detail as it lingers on a series of either emaciated or flabby bodies, none in a fit shape for work. Ali searches for his wife in a hospital and among prostitutes. In his search he has help from friends as well as the Russians

he encounters—even if they are not very friendly with him: they are representatives of structures, institutions, systems, but never individuals. The underlying suggestion is that Russians may do wrong, they may accept child labor, they may take bribes and give bribes, but they do so without any indication of hatred against migrants: Ali is towards the poorer end of the wealth scale of people in Russia's capital, and this is how the poor are treated, whether migrants or not. As *Gastarbaiter*, the film paints a neutral image of Russians, but it also offers a universal image of the fate of migrants, those people who leave nothing behind and have nothing to return to, who look for that "other sky" somewhere, losing their selves in the process. The final sequence where both Ali and his wife look at their faces in the mirror has been interpreted as an image of Ali's loss of identity when he sees only a blurred image in the mirror (Draskoczy 2010), yet the image focuses shortly after this. I would suggest that Ali and his wife here both look at their selves, their faces, for the first time consciously. Only after that can they look at each other again. They lost their faces, their identity, in the struggle for survival after the country's collapse, and they almost fail to recognize each other after their lives have been turned upside down.

Mamuliia draws a subtle picture of the dilemma of the migrant worker, without over-emphasizing the Russian setting. Indeed, the three protagonists hardly exchange any words in the film, although—unlike migrants in European cinema—they have a common language among them and share a language with the Muscovites. Mamuliia's film is much more in the tradition of European cinema of Fatih Akin or Rachid Bouchareb, addressing issues of the *Gastarbeiter* in Germany or France and fitting into a large and broader movement of transnational cinema that has, at least as far as Europe is concerned, been widely studied. In this respect I agree with the film's producer Arsen Gotlib who says:

> «Другое небо» – картина совсем другая, сводить ее только к социальной проблематике неверно. Это в первую очередь драма человека, который так любит свою жену, что идет искать ее в другой, совершенно чужой ему мир. «Другое небо» – история любви, а люди, которые ее придумали и создали, – они художники. Но если речь идет о мигрантах в России, понятно, что социальный оттенок неизбежен. Думаю, этот фильм

как раз довольно удобен для того, чтобы в эту тему войти и начать разговор.

[*Another Sky* is a different kind of film and it would be wrong to limit it to social issues. It is in the first place a film about a man who loves his wife so much that he goes to search for her in an alien world. *Another Sky* is a love story, and the people who thought up this story are artists. But if we talk about migrant workers in Russia, then it is obvious that we cannot avoid a social touch. I think this film is quite useful to find an approach to this topic and start a discussion.] (Gotlib 2010)

Larisa Sadilova's *Ona* [*She*] (2013) may be more specific in its setting (Moscow) and choice of migrant culture (Tajik), but it penetrates even deeper into the migrants' world, offering a view from the inside. Sadilova draws a distinct difference between her insider camera and the intrusive instrument used by the media reporter questioning a migrant after the police has raided the makeshift accommodation; the man flatly refuses to engage with the journalist. Moreover, Sadilova literally lends a voice (the voice-over of the producer Rustam Akhadov) to the migrant workers. Indeed, migrant workers had first appeared in a very positive light in Sadilova's *Trebuetsia niania* [*Babysitter Required*] (2005), where the lead role (Marina Zubanova) portrays a provincial girl who looks after the child of a well-off Russian couple, who are building and extending their house with the help of (illegal) Uzbek migrant workers. The nanny reports the Uzbeks to the police in an act of personal revenge when they gain the affection of the child much more easily than she does. The Gastarbeiter are kind and honest, and they are victims not of their employers but of a jealous and unhappy young woman. In *She* the migrant workers are much more in focus: Maiia arrives from Tajikistan to be with her beloved Khamid, who works in a Moscow suburb to earn money for his family back in Tajikistan. After a while Khamid, obeying his family's request, returns to his native country to accept his mother's plan for an arranged marriage. Maiia—who has no way of returning to Tajikistan, because she has broken with tradition by living with Khamid—remains in Moscow and begins a new life with the help of Nadia, a Russian woman who works at the market and lives with Khamid's uncle Akhmed, who had taken in the couple after the police raid on their accommodation. Sadilova's take on the gastarbeiter is unusual in

its insistence on the documentary-style approach to the camera discussed above, and in the choice of location: the migrants' living quarters are shown in their full squalor, which is sharpened through the contrast with the heroine's expectation of a fairy-tale Moscow:

> The director of photography Dmitrii Mishin compellingly conveys Maya's initial perception of Moscow as a magical escape from the restrictive patriarchy back home through wide-eyed point of view shots of brightly illuminated auto tunnels and a majestic full moon shining over the city's shimmering skyline as seen from the Moscow Ring Road. After the couple's descent into the darkness of the migrant worker shantytown where they have to share a bunk bed in a tiny room housing three other men, Maya re-adjusts her expectations but manages to preserve her hopeful outlook. (Monastireva-Ansdell 2014)

Moreover, Sadilova almost aggressively shows the corruption of the Russian officials on the example of the Federal Migration Service and local landlords who charge extortionate rents, but also of the Tajik traders who bring the workers illegally into Russia. The migrant worker is thus a victim of exploitation from both the "systems" run by Russians and Tajiks.

Maiia may be a victim of circumstances, but she preseveres, observes and adapts to her new situation and environment without learning the language. And she finds friends: Roman, Akhmad's son, who turns back to be with her as he and his father travel, along with the rest of the Tajik work force, to Tajikistan for the winter, when there is no work on the building sites; and Nadia takes her under her wings. This may not come as a surprise from a female filmmaker: Nadia is another independent woman who runs her own life, sets up her own business and makes a home for herself. The migrants (and the Russian woman) are victims of the system on one level; on another level, they do not blindly accept their victim status and endure their suffering, but they try to make things work and create "happy endings," even if on a romantic level (Roman and Maiia), with the prospect of a future—if not in the capital then on its outskirts, and not immediately. The migrant-victim has moved his function of a passive and submissive protagonist to one who, too, is capable of action, thus presenting some proximity to the victim-hero of Russian cinema.

The victim complex

If we accept that migrants are victims of a system in these recent films, and that the role of the victim has previously been played by Russian characters, we should position our reading of the films in a wider, socio-historical context, which serves here to highlight the shift from individual to system, when considering the aggressive force that constitutes one of the qualities of the "hero" on the silver screen. The sociologist Lev Gudkov defines the victim complex as a mechanism that allows man to compensate for a lack of self-respect and self-esteem, an indicator of a gratification deficit. It justifies general fatigue as the result of an authority's coercion of man into action and prevents man from turning plans into action. Indeed, it exempts the victim from action; it is a defense against an active Other that becomes the enemy, because it may coerce the victim into action.

> Комплекс жертвы работает как механизм, очищающий субъекта потенциального действия от каких бы то не было пороков, разгружающий от недостатков, чувства неполноценности, ущербности. Напротив, он наделяет субъекта скрытыми и потенциальными достоинствами, тем более значимыми, что они практически не подлежат проверке реальностью, они нереализуемы, не могут переходить в план исполнения.
>
> [The victim complex works as a mechanism that purifies the subject of possible action from any defects and relieves him or her from deficiencies, from a sense of inadequacy or loss. Instead, it endows the subject with latent and potential qualities that cannot be tested against reality, cannot be realized, cannot translate into action] (Gudkov 2004a, 101–2).

Gudkov's argument that the victim complex is symptomatic of post-Soviet Russia, to a larger extent even than during the Soviet era, is connected to the traditional lack of responsibility of the Soviet man for his actions: «Комплекс жертвы ... – это перверсия частной инициативы.» [The victim complex ... is a perversion of personal initiative] (Gudkov 2004a, 108). Moreover, Soviet citizens' suffering was enhanced by the victimization endured during the Stalin era. However, none of the historical traumas (collectivization, Stalinism, forced subjection to Soviet rule) had ever been collectively tackled or resolved. Therefore, the victim complex characterizes Russia's

self-perception, and strips the image of Russian-ness of the pseudo-confidence with which Soviet ideology endowed its citizens by claiming achievements, notably in the space and arms race, and in the victory over fascism in World War Two:

> Комплекс «жертвы» ... – механизм, структурирующий ... восприятие реальности как отдельным индивидом, так и массой в целом. Ощущение себя жертвой возникает до появления конкретного «насильника» ... Оно рождается в ответ на смутно ощущаемый дефицит гратификации, оснований для самоуважения индивида ...
>
> The 'victim' complex is [...] a mechanism that structures [...] the perception of reality as seen by the individual as well as by the masses. The sensation of the self as victim *precedes* the appearance of a concrete 'aggressor.' [...] It is born in answer to a vaguely felt deficit of gratification, of a basis for the individual's self esteem... (Gudkov 2004a, 98–9, emphasis in the original)

Activity is thus not only associated with the Other, but it makes that Other a potential enemy. Action is a negative quality for a Russian character, so that the active and decisive hero becomes, in the best-case scenario, a negative character. In the worst-case scenario, the active character turns into a criminal, a character who mainly achieves his goals through action and is thereby eliminated from the circle of "ours," those who share the Russian victim complex, and becomes marginalized or expelled from the group of "ours" into the opposite camp of "theirs" (Gudkov 2004a, 106).

The concept of the enemy is therefore intrinsically linked to the victim-complex. The enemy, or Other, is needed for self-affirmation, and to endow the victim with an explanation for his or her suffering. The enemy also justifies the status quo of the victim, because the enemy is the Other which the victim does not want to be (Gudkov 2004b, 555–6). The enemy concept, argues Gudkov, mobilizes group solidarity, which is needed at times of chaotic, pluralistic developments (e.g. in the 1930s the focus on the enemy of the people, and later on the external enemy aided Stalin's regime to consolidate power).

In the early 1990s, as Russia assimilated western models of democracy and economy, European nations became neighbors rather than potential (ideological) enemies representing the Other.

Russia was in want of a new enemy image. To a certain extent, the Chechen and other campaigns enabled the Russian people to unite as a nation vis-à-vis such a new enemy, albeit one that had been a part of the former, Soviet, multi-national self. In Russian cinema of the late 1990s, the perception of Russians as victims of social circumstance gradually gave way to a manifestation of assertiveness over the Other, usually identified as enemy. During the zero years, the trend towards a strong Russia grew increasingly stronger, culminating in a sense of patriotism that impacted on culture in general and cinema in particular (see Velikodneva and Ryzhenko 2013). For example, the Fund for Patriotic Cinema (www.patriotfilm.ru) was set up in 2004 with the remit to promote patriotic films; to date only a few have been made: *Kod apokalipsis* [*Code Apocalypse*] in 2007 and Khotinenko's *Pop* [*The Priest*] in 2010. Moreover, the Ministry of Defense can allocate a part of its budget to the production of patriotic fiction and animation films from 2014 onwards. These initiatives will, no doubt, sooner or later influence and change the representation of the Russian hero on the screen.

Conclusion

To return to Gudkov's distinctions: the negative portrayal of active characters informs the Russian cinema of the 1990s. Moreover, Russia's self-perception finds confirmation in American cinema:[3] the action-man as Russian gangster can be found largely in Hollywood cinema. The negative portrayal of activity is now attached to the Russian character, while the passive victim (the Gastarbeiter) becomes the hero, exposed to suffering because of Russian aggression and assertiveness. The call that has rung out in Russian film policy-making since the infamous 1997 Congress of the Filmmakers' Union, when Nikita Mikhalkov called for the need of an active hero in Russian cinema (Mikhalkov in Beumers 1999: 50–53) has found an answer: only that it leaves the migrant in the role of the morally superior victim, and therefore, I would argue, the new hero. What has changed are the attributes of Russian identity; what has remained is the value of suffering, meekness and passivity that has been inherent in Russian and Soviet culture. Numerous initiatives

[3] For a study of the representation of the Soviet/Russian hero in American and European cinema, see Beumers 2008.

to support patriotic cinema are in place to rectify the situation and create assertive and active Russian heroes.

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Abstract

Der vorliegende Beitrag untersucht Verschiebungen in der Darstellung von Gastarbeitern im russischen Gegenwartsfilm. Arbeitsmigranten aus früheren Sowjetrepubliken gehörten einst zur selben ‚Sowjetnation' und erscheinen nun als der Andere. Dieser Andere wird zunächst als Feind betrachtet, der handgreiflicher russischer Aggression zum Opfer fällt, bevor er zum Opfer institutionellen Unrechts wird. Unter Rückgriff auf Lev Gudkovs Begriff des Opferkomplexes wird gezeigt, wie Passivität, Demut und Leidensbereitschaft – Eigenschaften, die traditionell den russischen Helden ausmachen –, auf Arbeitsmigranten übertragen werden, die damit zu neuen Helden des russischen Kinos der 2000er Jahre avancieren. Indessen nehmen die russischen Protagonisten Merkmale wie Aggression und Aktivität an, die bis dato für russische Filmhelden untypisch waren. Der Gastarbeiter-Held stellt sich im gleichen Maße als Übergangsphänomen dar, wie die russischen Figuren die Qualitäten des amerikanischen Actionhelden annehmen und so einen neuen russischen Filmhelden-Typus konstituieren.